Gender & Society
http://gas.sagepub.com/

Gender in Context, Content, and Approach : Comparing Gender Messages in Girl Scout and Boy Scout Handbooks

Kathleen E. Denny

Gender & Society 2011 25: 27
DOI: 10.1177/0891243210390517

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://gas.sagepub.com/content/25/1/27

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:

Sociologists for Women in Society

Additional services and information for *Gender & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://gas.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://gas.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://gas.sagepub.com/content/25/1/27.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Jan 20, 2011

What is This?

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

GENDER IN CONTEXT, CONTENT, AND APPROACH

Comparing Gender Messages in Girl Scout and Boy Scout Handbooks

KATHLEEN E. DENNY
University of Maryland, College Park

I explore gender messages in Boy Scout and Girl Scout handbooks through an analysis of how gender is infused in the context and content of Scout activities as well as in instructions about how the Scouts are to approach these activities. I find that girls are offered more activities intended to be performed in group contexts than are boys. Boys are offered proportionately more activities with scientific content and proportionately fewer artistic activities than are girls. The girls' handbook conveys messages about approaching activities with autonomous and critical thinking, whereas the boys' handbook facilitates intellectual passivity through a reliance on organizational scripts. Taken together, girls' messages promote an "up-to-date traditional woman" consistent with the Girl Scouts' organizational roots; boys' messages promote an assertive heteronormative masculinity that is offset by facilitating boys' intellectual passivity.

Keywords: *adolescence/children; media/mass communications; men/masculinity*

Children are exposed to gender socializing messages from a diverse range of sources—from institutions such as families and schools to cultural products such as television and books. These can be communicated overtly and explicitly, and they can also be communicated subtly, inadvertently, and unobtrusively through culture. Exposure to and interpretation of cultural beliefs about gender (Ridgeway and Correll 2000, 2004),

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Melissa A. Milkie, Gail Murphy-Geiss, Mady W. Segal, and Dawn Norris for their invaluable guidance and feedback. I also wish to thank the editor, deputy editor, and the anonymous reviewers for their extremely insightful and useful comments on this article.* *Please direct correspondence to: Kathleen E. Denny, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland, 2112 Art-Sociology Building, College Park, MD 20742; kdenny@socy.umd.edu.*

GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 25 No. 1, February 2011 27-47
DOI: 10.1177/0891243210390517
© 2011 by The Author(s)

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

transmitted through indirect and often subtle "gender messages," may influence children's future educational and occupational trajectories (Correll 2001). A significant body of research has exposed the sources of these subtle yet influential gender messages and decoded the content of the messages themselves.

The single-sex youth organization is one such source of gender messages directed at children and adolescents. In addition to schools, families, and cultural texts (Smith 1990), the youth organization, particularly the sex-segregated youth organization, is a "potentially powerful socializing agent" (Furnham, Abramsky, and Gunter 1997, 91), communicating messages to its members, both intentionally and unintentionally, about appropriate gender behavior. Gender may be not only more visible but also more pronounced in single-sex environments where there may be fewer restrictions on appropriate gender enactment (Acker 1999). Furthermore, focusing on youth organizations sheds additional light on children's worlds, which scholars have suggested be more thoroughly examined (Corsaro 2005).

The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are two single-sex youth organizations with established gendered histories. Gender was a central consideration in the formation of these organizations more than 100 years ago and continues to be so today. Nearly 5 million American children participate in the Scouts organizations (Boy Scouts of America n.d.; Girl Scouts of the USA 2008). This is a nontrivial population of children who are likely exposed to particular gender messages, the nature of which is not currently well articulated in the literature. The comparable organizational structure of the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts allows for fruitful comparison of gender messages. By comparing the messages intended for the boys and girls in these organizations, I am able to show not only what is being communicated about gender but also, importantly, what is not (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Smith 1990).

I explore gender messages in the Scouts by performing textual and content analyses of Boy Scout and Girl Scout handbooks, texts that Auster (1985, 366) referred to as "manuals for socialization." I compare gender messages in the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts by examining the context, content, and approach of the texts. By *context,* I mean the context in which the badge activities are intended to be performed—whether by oneself or with others in group contexts. I also examine the content of the badges and badge activities—the types of badges and activities the Scouts are offered. Finally, I examine the perspective or orientation with which the Scouts are expected to approach the activities in the handbooks. By analyzing all three of these dimensions in the handbooks, I am able to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the gender messages being conveyed through these instructional texts.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

GENDER MESSAGES IN CHILDREN'S TEXTS

Much of the research about how gender is communicated through cultural texts (Smith 1990) has examined children's media products, such as children's books (Gooden and Gooden 2001; Grauerholz and Pescosolido 1989; Hamilton et al. 2006; Jackson and Gee 2005; Weitzman et al. 1972), children's television programming (Banet-Weiser 2004; Furnham, Abramsky, and Gunter 1997; Leaper et al. 2002), and educational media such as textbooks (Bailey 1993; Beyer et al. 1996; Evans and Davies 2000; Tietz 2007).

Context: Gender Presence

Most research exploring gender messages in children's texts has analyzed differences in the presence of male and female characters. Particularly in texts directed at mixed audiences, studies have looked at who is present (girls' presence relative to boys'). This research reveals a consistent finding, namely, that female characters are consistently underrepresented as main and title characters in children's literature (Hamilton et al. 2006; Weitzman et al. 1972). In their pioneering examination of gender representation in children's award-winning picture books in the 1960s, Weitzman and colleagues (1972) found that female characters were considerably underrepresented both in the titles of books and as their main characters. Twenty-first-century updates of Weitzman and colleagues' work have identified improvements in the presence of female characters in children's books, but the underrepresentation of girls and women persists (Hamilton et al. 2006). Hamilton and colleagues (2006) reported that although the ratio of male-to-female representation has improved since the 1970s, males continue to disproportionately outnumber females in terms of book titles and main characters in Caldecott Award–winning books.

These studies find that there are also important differences in representational contexts, such as whether characters appear alone or in groups. Gooden and Gooden (2001) found that female characters were significantly less likely to appear alone in illustrations than were male characters, a finding they regarded as indicative of persistent gender inequality because appearing alone is a marker of independence and autonomy, whereas appearing in groups is thought to convey dependency, a stereotypical marker of traditional femininity.

Content: Gender Portrayal

Even more so than presence, the portrayal of gender in children's texts has been of considerable interest for researchers in this area. Presence and

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

portrayal are not necessarily congruous. That is, greater presence of female characters does not necessarily imply more egalitarian portrayal. Clark and colleagues (2003) found in their 40-year review of Caldecott Award–winning books from 1930 through 1960 that the increased presence of girl characters was accompanied by greater gender stereotyping. That is, award-winning books from the 1930s and 1950s had greater numbers of female characters, but the characters were portrayed more stereotypically than in the books from the 1940s and 1960s in which female characters were fewer in number. Weitzman and colleagues (1972) reported that girl characters were portrayed as passive, homebound supporters next to active boy characters and occupationally oriented men characters. They concluded that "girls who wish to be more than placid and pretty are left without an acceptable role alternative" (1972, 1138). Despite considerable improvements in portrayal over the century (Clark, Lennon, and Morris 1993), scholars continue to find evidence of stereotypical gender portrayals, with female characters significantly more likely to engage in nurturing behaviors than male characters and male characters significantly more likely to be portrayed as active, working, and in motion (Hamilton et al. 2006; Jackson and Gee 2005).[1]

Similar conclusions about stereotypical gender portrayal have been drawn from analyses of educational materials. Evans and Davies (2000) focused primarily on the portrayal of male characters in elementary school reading textbooks. Despite major policy shifts such as Title IX and publishers' own guidelines, the authors found that boy characters were consistently portrayed with stereotypically masculine qualities, such as aggression and competitiveness. Girl characters, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to be portrayed as passive and emotionally expressive. Tietz (2007) reported a similar finding regarding passivity in her examination of accounting textbooks; male characters were portrayed as active—participating in a sport or shown in motion—significantly more often than female characters. Bailey (1993, 328) concurred in her review of research that has been conducted on gender messages in curricular materials such as textbooks, educational videos, and computer software, concluding that "what is taught via these formal curricular materials reinforces . . . for both girls and boys, a subordinate role for girls in our schools and our society."

Gendered Approach

The way children's texts communicate messages about gendered perspectives and approaches to the world has rarely been examined in this literature. Instead, this topic has been taken up more frequently by research assessing

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

organizational and institutional practices in schools (Connell 2000; Heyward 1995) and on sports teams (Lesko 2001; Messner 2000, 2009). Heyward (1995) documented gender messages communicated at a Canadian high school for girls. She pointed to the school's athletic program as one source of gender messages about a stereotypically feminine approach to athletics, one of nonaggression and complicity; girls were encouraged to be gracious players rather than competitive winners. In contrast, Lesko (2001, 168) has discussed hypermasculinity, marked by aggression and competitiveness, that is cultivated through boys' participation in school athletic teams, particularly football. Similarly, Messner (2000) noted how aggression was fostered in the boys' youth soccer teams he observed through the wide use of power-oriented team names and mascots such as "Killer Whales" and "Raptor Attack"; no such aggression in team names or mascots existed on the girls' teams. In his recent update, Messner (2009, 104) focused more on coaches' perspectives, identifying a range of approaches to coaching among the men, ranging from a warm and nurturing "Teddy Bear" approach to a more traditional, no-nonsense "Drill Sergeant" approach. Although not the central concern of Messner's (2009) analysis, the approach of the coaches on these soccer teams likely importantly informs those of the young players.

Messages about how children are instructed to approach the world and orient action is less common in research on children's texts than examinations of gender presence and portrayal. These questions of approach, however, are also central to a more comprehensive understanding of the range and nature of gender messages communicated to children in texts and other sources. Using Scout handbooks, texts that are both instructional and interactive in nature, I am able to contribute to the literature on gender messages to children by examining both the more commonly studied dimensions of context and content and this relatively untapped dimension of gendered approach.

HISTORY OF THE BOY SCOUTS AND GIRL SCOUTS

The Boy Scouts of America, founded in the United States in 1910, was an offshoot of the militaristically oriented British Boy Scouts formed by Sir Robert Baden-Powell at the turn of the twentieth century. Rosenthal (1986, 7) likened the early British scouting organization, with its emphasis on "submission and discipline," to a factory whose objective it was to "manufacture uniform products under detailed specifications for particular uses." He went on to say that "both specifications and uses . . . were supplied by a coherent ideology stressing *unquestioning obedience* to properly structured authority" (emphasis added).

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

According to scholars who have examined Boy Scouts history, the organization was founded and grew in popularity in the United States largely in response to the "crisis of masculinity" that was disrupting the rapidly industrializing United States at the end of the nineteenth century (Hantover 1982; Mechling 2001). Scouting was an opportunity to counteract the perceived "forces of feminization" impinging on boys' and men's lives at the time (Hantover 1982, 293), and the rhetoric and content of Scouting were explicitly designed to allay "masculine fears of passivity and dependence" (p. 294). Experiencing nature and developing outdoor skills were integral parts of the project of masculinization (Hantover 1982).

The Girl Scouts organization was founded in the United States by Juliette "Daisy" Gordon Low in 1912 as an extension of the Boy Scouts. According to the first American Girl Scout handbook, titled *How Girls Can Help Their Country,* 6,000 girls had tried to enroll in Baden-Powell's British Boy Scout troops but were turned away. As a compromise, Baden-Powell asked his sister Agnes to found the Girl Guides in Britain, "a similar organization for girls, based on the Boy Scout laws, with activities and occupations properly adapted for girls" (Low 1917, 1). Low, a friend of the Baden-Powell siblings, established the organization in the United States in 1912, changing the name of the organization from Girl Guides to Girl Scouts the following year. Believing that "all girls should be given the opportunity to develop physically, mentally, and spiritually," Low structured the "girl-centered organization" to offer activities traditionally inaccessible to young women such as outdoor recreation and leadership activities. Unable to escape the pressures of societal expectation, however, the "Girl Scouts chose to minimize the incompatibilities of their program with traditional mores for girls and emphasized instead the ways in which scouting enhanced a girl's chances to be an 'up-to-date' traditional woman" (Rothschild 1981, 117). According to Rothschild (1981, 117), this meant offering the girls many of the same opportunities as the boys with the justification that such a program would only supplement and positively reinforce girls' training to become wives and mothers, their "destined" roles. In this way, the Girl Scouts were able to provide "up-to-date" (but often nontraditional) opportunities for girls that were designed to enhance, not detract from, their experiences as traditional wives and mothers.

The existence of these two parallel but differently gendered organizations offers a unique opportunity to examine gendered messages and the gender socialization of children. In this article, I examine how Scout handbooks implicitly communicate messages about gender through an examination of (1) the context of activities—with whom the Scouts participate in activities, (2) the content of activities—the types of activities and badges offered, and (3) the approach to the activities—the attitude with which Scouts are expected to approach these activities.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

METHOD

Data

Data come from the *Webelos Handbook* for the Boy Scouts and the *Junior Girl Scout Handbook* and *Junior Girl Scout Badge Book* for the Girl Scouts.[2] Although I refer to the former as Boy Scout messages, it is important to note that the Webelos rank is, in fact, the oldest rank of the Cub Scouts. The membership of the Boy Scouts of America is divided into two age groups—Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. The Cub Scouts is the younger division and is made up of members ranging in age from 7 to 10. The Boy Scouts range in age from 11 to 17. Although the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are both parts of the same parent organization, the two groups operate under somewhat different structures. For example, members recite different laws and value statements and have slightly different badge attainment processes. Nevertheless, the suborganizations are arguably more similar than different given that they are parts of the same overarching organization.

I compare the Webelos rank to the Junior rank for Girl Scouts because the age range for membership in both ranks is the same—children in the fourth and fifth grades. There are few other ranks across these organizations where the age ranges match so closely. Additionally, the preadolescent or preteen life stage has increasingly come to be considered one of the most consequential stages for identity and esteem development in youth (Adler and Adler 1998; Collins 1984; Doswell et al. 1998). For ease of presenting these results, I refer to the Webelos handbook as the "boys' handbook" and the Junior handbook as the "girls' handbook."

On first glance, the aesthetics of the two handbooks are different. The boys' handbook is thick and squat like a novel, while the girls' handbook and badgebook are somewhat less thick but nearly twice the size. The layout of the boys' handbook is unadorned and straightforward with its mostly white pages and standard black font, although there are colored pictures and diagrams throughout. In contrast, the layout of the girls' handbook and badgebook are more playful. The pages and text are very colorful, and there is a greater amount and diversity of images, graphics, and illustrations.

Measures

Using the three analytical dimensions of context, content, and approach, I conducted a multiphase analysis of the handbooks. The first phase was a quantitative content analysis of the badge titles and badge activities. In this phase, I coded and counted particular attributes of badges and badge

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

activities. The second phase was a textual analysis of the official statements, including each group's motto, oath/promise, set of laws, and core values statement. In this article, I pay particular attention to findings from my comparisons of the Girl Scout and Cub Scout promises and the Girl Scout and Boy Scout laws. The third phase was a close reading of comparable badges and their associated activities from each handbook to illustrate some of the important distinctions in gendered approach. Findings from the first phase of the analysis make up the Gender in Context and Gender in Content sections of the results, and findings from the second and third phases inform my arguments about the gendered approach of the handbooks.

Context. There are 20 badges and 323 badge activities offered in the boys' handbook and 104 badges and 1,440 badge activities offered in the girls' handbook. Very often a single activity contains several subcomponents. Thus, one activity may have two, three, or even four parts for the Scout to do, and each part may speak to a different skill or activity code. I applied my coding scheme to each of the activity subcomponents and coded each into only one category.

In operationalizing the context of the activities, I coded whether the activity description indicated that the activity was intended to take place alone or with/for others.[3] I refer to activities explicitly instructed to take place with or for others as "others-oriented activities" and activities either explicitly instructed to take place individually or not explicitly instructed to take place in groups as "self-oriented activities." An example of a self-oriented activity is, "Draw a floor plan of your home," for the boys' Engineer badge (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 212). An example of an others-oriented activity for the girls is, "In a troop, group, or with other girls, brainstorm a list of ways you can help the environment," for the Your Outdoor Surroundings badge (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001, 127).

Content. I also coded the types of activities the Scouts are offered in the handbooks. I focused specifically on the frequency with which the handbooks offered the Scouts scientific and artistic activities. The relative availability of scientific activities is a particularly important consideration given the extensive literature that demonstrates girls' and women's persistent underrepresentation in scientific fields and professions (Correll 2001; Guimond and Roussel 2001; Lee 1998). An example of a scientific activity is, "Make a polymer," for the girls' Make It Matter badge (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001, 189). An example of an artistic activity is, "Create a collage that expresses something about you," for the boys' Artist badge (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 102).

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

I also coded the content of badge titles, identifying whether badge names contained wordplay. I defined wordplay as a literary technique such as alliteration or a pun. For example, the girls' Frosty Fun badge was coded as having wordplay, whereas the boys' Engineer badge was not. The intercoder reliability rate for both the context and the content coding was 93.8 percent.[4]

Approach. I examined how the handbooks communicated messages about approach and perspective through qualitative and textual analyses of the data. Like Dworkin and Wachs did in their textual analysis of fitness magazine articles, I performed a qualitative examination of the handbooks to bring forth "assumptions underlying the text" (2004, 614) regarding how the children should approach activities in the handbooks. Rather than code the texts for the presence or absence of any particular trait, I assessed them holistically, attuned to themes and patterns that emerged having to do with the attitude or approach endorsed by the texts. I performed textual analyses of the girls' and boys' handbooks' official statements as well as a focused comparison of a comparable pair of badges—the girls' Model Citizen badge and the boys' Citizen badge. I present findings from the comparison of the citizen badges because the nature of the activities offered in these badges is very similar, bringing gender differences into sharper relief. Comparing these two parallel badges allowed me to control for activity type and concentrate instead on how the handbooks encourage the Scouts to approach these activities. Nevertheless, the broader themes I identify in terms of approach in the focused comparison of these two badges exist throughout the handbooks across many badges.

FINDINGS

Gender in Context

The context in which the Scouts are expected to take part in handbook activities communicates gender messages in powerful ways. Through the context of their activities, the Scouts are exposed to a central tenet of stereotypical femininity and masculinity: assumptions about girls' orientation toward others and boys' orientation toward self (Chodorow 1974; Ridgeway and Correll 2000, 2004). Girls are offered proportionately more communal or others-oriented activities than boys, who are offered proportionately more self-oriented activities. Figure 1 displays this relationship graphically, and *t*-tests reveal statistically significant ($t = 4.60$, $p < .05$) differences in these proportions. Thirty percent ($n = 427$) of the girls' badgework activities

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

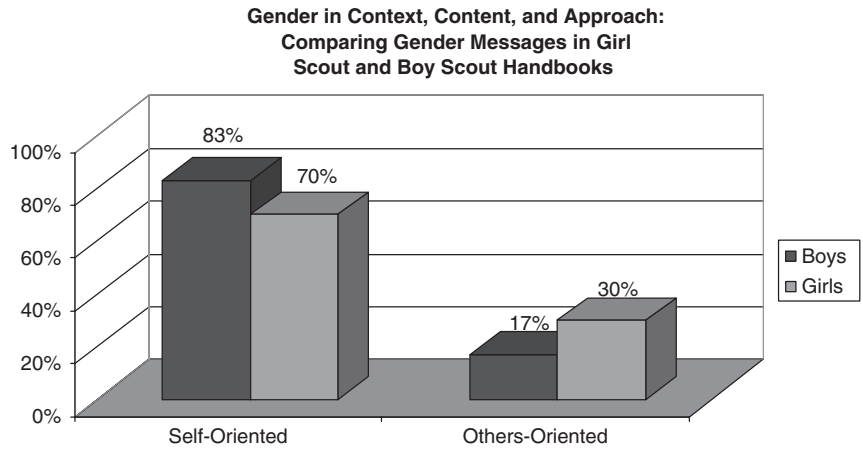

Figure 1: Percentage of Self-oriented versus Others-oriented Activities by Group

NOTE: Gender differences are statistically significant ($t = 4.60$, $p < .05$).

are intended to take place in groups, either with or for others, whereas less than 20 percent ($n = 55$) of the boys' activities are intended to take place with others. The majority of the boys' badge-earning activities (83 percent, $n = 268$) ask the Scouts to answer questions by consulting the back of the book and to construct individual projects.

Gender in Content

The content of activities also communicates messages about gender. As Figure 2 shows, girls are more likely than the boys to be offered activities involving art projects, while boys are more often presented with activities involving science projects. Girls' art activities make up 11 percent ($n = 156$) of their total activities, while boys' art activities make up approximately 6 percent ($n = 19$), a statistically significant difference ($t = 2.69$, $p < .05$). Scientifically oriented activities, on the other hand, make up only 2 percent ($n = 29$) of all girls' activities, whereas they make up 6 percent ($n = 18$) of boys' activities—nearly three times as many ($t = -3.59$, $p < .05$). A chi-square test reveals a statistically significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 20.09$, $p < .05$) between sex and type of activity (science vs. art). The disproportionate and gendered distribution of art and science projects aligns with the large body of research that finds girls being systematically derailed from scientific and mathematical pursuits and professions due to cultural beliefs and stereotypes about

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

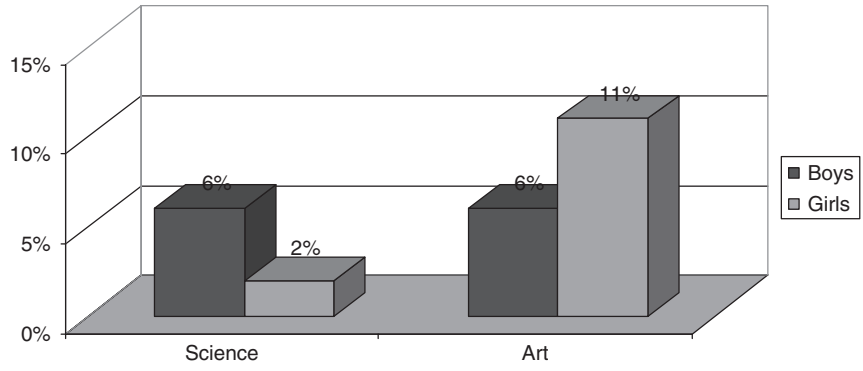

Figure 2: Percentage of Science versus Art Activities by Group
NOTE: Gender differences are statistically significant for both science activities ($t = -3.59$, $p < .05$) and art activities ($t = 2.69$, $p < .05$).

their relative ineptitude in these areas (Correll 2001; Guimond and Roussel 2001; Lee 1998). Similarly, as girls are being steered away from scientific pursuits, boys may also be experiencing a funneling away from artistic interests and pursuits, further reinforcing gendered occupational trajectories.

The content of the badge titles also conveys gender messages. Stereotypical messages about embellished femininity and stoic masculinity are communicated in the level of playfulness (and the lack thereof) that characterize the girls' and boys' badge titles. There is a significant difference in the use of wordplay in boys' and girls' badge titles: 27 percent ($n = 28$) of girls' badge titles use playful literary techniques such as alliteration and puns, while 0 percent of boys' badge titles do so ($t = 2.64$, $p < .05$). Conversely, all 20 boys' badges (100 percent) have descriptive titles without using any playful wording, while 73 percent ($n = 76$) of the girls' badges have descriptive titles ($t = -2.64$, $p < .05$). The boys' badge dealing with rocks and geology, for example, is called the Geologist badge, while the comparable girls' badge is called the Rocks Rock badge. Boys' badge titles use more career-oriented language (e.g., Engineer, Craftsman, Scientist), whereas girls' badge titles more often use playful language that has less of a career orientation (e.g., Sky Search instead of Astronomer or Car Care instead of Mechanic). When boys speak to others about their Geologist badge, they have a legitimate career title to use and are likely to be taken more seriously in conversations than girls discussing their achievement of a Rocks Rock badge.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

In addition to the style of the badge titles, the content of the badge titles themselves, the types of activities to which they refer, are the most explicitly gendered dimensions in the girls' handbook. Examples of badges that have to do with stereotypically feminine activities include Caring for Children, Looking Your Best, and Sew Simple. In addition to activities about personal hygiene and healthy eating, the Looking Your Best badge offers activities such as a "Color Party" that asks the girls to "take turns holding different colors up to your face [to] decide which colors look best on each of you." That same badge also offers the activity option of an "Accessory Party" where the girls "experiment to see how accessories highlight your features and your outfit" (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001a, 39). These badges are not offered in the Boy Scouts; the boys' Fitness badge, the only one approximating a personal style badge, offers activities such as completing a weeklong food diary and telling a family member about the dangers of drugs and alcohol (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 246-47).

The girls' handbook also offers badges that have to do with activities that are less stereotypically feminized, including a leadership badge and a business skills badge. Badges such as Lead On and Business-Wise focus on the skills needed to run one's own small business or "be your own boss" (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001a, 10). These types of badges reflect an ideological reversal from previous generations' conceptions of femininity that provided girls with very few acceptable life trajectories, although the presence of child care and sewing badges indicates that more traditional conceptions of femininity persist in Girl Scout messages.

Gender in Approach

The analysis of mindset in the handbooks reveals multidimensional messages about gender. On one hand, through handbook activities and official statements, girls are being encouraged to cultivate a stereotypically gendered achievement approach—an "I'll try" attitude. On the other hand, countering the many messages about passivity and dependence identified in previous research on children's literature, the girls' handbook simultaneously encourages girls, through the nature of their badge activities, to be autonomous, intellectually critical, and self-determined.

Boys' messages convey almost the opposite meaning. The boys' handbook encourages ascription through its official statements—an "I am" attitude. Compared to the girls' handbook, however, the boys' handbook provides far fewer opportunities for critical and autonomous thinking. Instead, boys are encouraged to rely on organizational scripts that feed them correct answers.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

In this way, despite explicit and consistent messages about active heteronormative gender display, the boys' handbook also fosters intellectual dependence and passivity.

Ascription versus achievement. The Girl Scout and Cub Scout promises are comparable in tone and objective. They are official statements published in the handbooks that are recited at group meetings and are required to be memorized on entering the organization. They both reference God, country, and citizenship. There is a noteworthy distinction, however, between the words "try" and "promise" in the phrasing of the official statements. The girls are asked to "try" to accomplish the goals in the promise, while the boys are asked to "promise" to accomplish them. While this may seem only a minor stylistic difference, this mirrors other messages in the handbooks that encourage effort for girls and confidence and ability for boys. An achievement attitude implies achieving or earning a certain status through effort, while an ascription attitude implies an understanding that a certain status is de facto possessed—not earned—by virtue of being (McIntyre 2006). This distinction is further evidenced in the Boy Scout and Girl Scout laws.[5] For example, a section of the Girl Scout law reads, "I will do my best to be considerate and caring," while the Boy Scout law states that "a Scout is courteous and kind." Like "try" and "promise," the qualitative difference between "do my best to be" and "is" is important; they both communicate the message that girls can try to do or become what boys are or can promise to be. These organizational texts facilitate the development of an achievement attitude for girls (I will do my best to be) and an ascription attitude and a sense of entitled self-assuredness for boys (I am).[6] The official statements speak to expectations about traditional gender prescriptions because stereotypical masculinity involves the performance of an unabashed self-assuredness that rejects the possibility of failure, while stereotypical femininity involves the performance of an unassuming humility, downplaying the prospect of success (Clark and Paechter 2007).

Criticality versus passivity. Results from the qualitative content analysis of the handbooks show that originality, critical thinking, and autonomous decision making are encouraged in the girls' handbook but far more restricted in the boys' handbook. A focused comparison of two badges—the girls' Model Citizen badge and the boys' Citizen badge—provides a clear example.

Activity number 7 of the boys' Citizen badge asks the boys to, "Explain the rights and duties of a citizen of the United States" (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 146). A few pages later in the handbook, a reader would come upon

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

the right-hand page, "Your Rights and Duties," which provides all of the answers and explanations necessary for successfully completing this activity. The girls are also asked about the rights and duties of U.S. citizens but are not provided the answers. Instead, activity number 2 for the girls' Model Citizen badge reads, "What do you think are some of the rights and responsibilities that come with being a citizen of the United States? Ask different members of the community what they think and compare and discuss the answers that you get" (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001, 199). No answers are provided in the text, and girls are instructed to speak with a variety of people and synthesize their responses.

Similarly, both the boys' and girls' badges offer activities dealing with the concept of government. These demonstrate the same pattern of boys' intellectual passivity and girls' creativity. Whereas the boys are asked to, "Tell why we have government," and are then provided that information in a subsequent section (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 146), the girls are asked to create their own government "from scratch" using certain board or computer games (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001a, 20). In activity number 4, the girls are again asked to exercise critical thinking when they are given the option to design laws for given scenarios (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001a, 20).

The girls' Model Citizen badge and boys' Citizen badge both have activities that ask the Scouts to explore and brainstorm about good citizenship. Both groups are asked to describe or list qualities of a good citizen/neighbor. The boys are then provided that information in a subsection titled "Citizenship and You" (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 157-59). The girls' handbook, on the other hand, does not provide the answer but rather expects the girls to think critically and arrive at an original answer through research and exploration. According to Revzin's (1998) historical review of the earliest Girl Scout literature, the development of research skills has always been an organizational objective for the Girl Scouts.

Finally, one of the most interesting intellectual activities in the girls' Model Citizen badge is an encouragement to explore protest rights in the United States. By providing the opportunity for girls to learn about protesting, the girls' handbook communicates the message that defending one's principles and standing up for what one believes, regardless of the nature of the belief, is important. The boys' handbook, on the other hand, does not reference social or political protest.

Although I focus here on the Citizen and Model Citizen badges, there are such instances of intellectual passivity for boys and intellectual criticality and autonomy for girls throughout the handbooks. The girls' Rocks Rock badge and the boys' Geologist badge provide another such example. Most

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

of the boys' activities for this badge require only consultation with the back of the book; for instance, the boys are asked to give examples of minerals used in day-to-day products and "explain one way in which mountains are formed" (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 280). Answers to both of these questions are located a few pages later in the informational section for that badge. The girls, on the other hand, are asked to start a rock collection and classify their rocks by consulting other books, Web sites, or maps. Other activities in the girls' handbook for this badge ask them to "hook up with a group that is trying to fight the effects of erosion" and find out more about a location in the world that has been affected by a natural disaster (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001, 199). The reliance on provided answers is pervasive in the boys' handbook, while badge activities throughout the girls' handbook encourage the girls' use and development of research skills, proactive behavior, and independent and critical thought.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the types of gender messages conveyed in the Boy Scout and Girl Scout handbooks. The girls' handbook conveys both traditionally feminine and more progressive messages. The boys' handbook is much less equivocal in its endorsement of traditional heteronormative masculinity but also limits boys' criticality and intellectual autonomy, two hallmarks of traditional masculinity. Rather than dilute the other prominent messages about traditional masculinity, limiting boys' opportunities for self-directed thinking likely facilitates the organizational cultivation project that seeks to build boys "under detailed specifications" (Rosenthal 1986, 7).

Taken together, the gender messages communicated to girls through context, content, and approach convey gender messages that are consistent with the gender messages propagated by the original Girl Scout founders. Rothschild (1981) referred to the "up-to-date traditional woman" as the model of womanhood that guided the curriculum of even the earliest Girl Scout troops. In this way, the competing feminine and more progressive messages that exist in today's handbook have existed in the handbooks in one way or another since the organization's founding.

The messages in the girls' handbook certainly communicate more than the "rigid sex-role portraits" documented by Weitzman and colleagues (1972) in mid-twentieth-century picture books and even go beyond the persistent yet somewhat tamer gender stereotyping that persists today in books and textbooks designed for mixed-sex audiences (Evans and Davies 2000;

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

Hamilton et al. 2006; Jackson and Gee 2005; Tietz 2007). The girls' messages are far from being entirely egalitarian, however. Providing the girls with proportionately more others-oriented and artistic activities than self-oriented and scientific activities is an example of the communication of a version of traditional femininity (Chodorow 1974). Moreover, the use of "cute" badge language for girls but not boys may be a subtle undermining of girls' progressive achievements.

The "up-to-date traditional woman" model Rothschild (1981) identified continues to structure organizational content for the Girl Scouts. There is a balance to be struck within this gendered culture between a traditional femininity characterized by effort and relationality and a progressive feminist identity characterized by personal agency and empowerment. The incongruity in the gender messages being transmitted in the Girl Scout handbooks is a frequently articulated theme in the gender literature (Gonick 2004; Heyward 1995; Mensinger 2001). The negotiation between traditional and progressive feminine identities is a problematic balance for girls today, for the onus is on them to blend their relational and independent selves. To couch this model in terms of the work-family balance literature, the gender messages being communicated in the Girl Scouts appear to be preparing girls to one day take on the dual roles of devoted worker and selfless mother (Blair-Loy 2003; Garey 1999; Hochschild 1989).

The boys' handbook communicates clear messages about heteronormative masculinity, characterized by autocentrism (Chodorow 1974), ascription, and a scientific rather than an artistic orientation. These traditional messages strongly resemble the masculinizing messages found in other cultural media such as picture books and textbooks (Hamilton et al. 2006; Tietz 2007; Weitzman et al. 1972). Significantly, not all of the boys' messages invoke traditional masculinity. The boys' handbook also communicates messages about passivity and dependence by limiting intellectual autonomy (e.g., providing answers to badge activities) and funneling gender development. These messages align in interesting ways with the literature on class-based socialization (Kohn 1959, 1979; Lareau 2003). Boys' messages fit more closely with working-class parents' valuations of "conformity to external authority," whereas girls' messages about autonomous and critical thinking align more with middle-class parenting values (Kohn 1979, 49). The connection between the social class and racial makeup of the Scouts and the messages being communicated via the Scout handbooks is intriguing and worth continued investigation.

I cannot say, of course, how the gender messages communicated impersonally in the handbooks compare to the types of messages communicated

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

in person during troop/pack meetings and ceremonies. In addition, I cannot draw any conclusions about how the gender messages communicated via the handbooks influence the behavior of the children who are exposed to them. These are critical questions for further research. Currie's dialectical discourse analysis of women's beauty and fashion magazines is a good example of studying "text as 'process'" (1999, 19)—that is, examining how messages are presented in social texts and then how they are interpreted and consumed by those who are exposed to them. Connell's work on gender messages in single-sex schools emphasizes a similar point; although gender messages in schools are like social facts, impersonal and pervasive, the terms on which students participate and engage with these messages "are negotiable—whether adjusting to the patterns, rebelling against them, or trying to modify them" (2000, 154). The extent to which children adjust to, rebel against, and/or modify the gender messages they receive likely depends on how the messages interact with their social location characteristics such as race and peer context (Milkie 1999). Although children cannot avoid being exposed to cultural messages and beliefs about gender, how and to what extent these messages are being received and acted on are crucial questions for future research.

The Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts offer a particularly intriguing landscape for gender analysis as comparably structured, sex-segregated, and gendered organizations. Comparing how gender is communicated through context, content, and approach in the official handbooks of these organizations builds on the strong foundation of research examining children's gender messages in children's literature and other media. Continued exploration into the nature of gender messages, both in terms of what they emphasize and what they omit, allows us to more comprehensively understand what children are explicitly and implicitly being taught about gender. Knowing what these messages look like and how they are being communicated is an important first step in the effort to erode persisting gender inequalities.

NOTES

1. Clark, Lennon, and Morris (1993) caution scholars against labeling girls' expressiveness and nurturance as disempowering. They argue that the portrayal of adult women engaging in relational and nurturing activities in their sample of books illustrated by African American illustrators represents Black feminist theorists' understanding of the "ethic of caring" as a critical and empowering dimension of Black womanhood (Collins 1990).

2. There are two Girl Scout texts listed because the organization separates badge attainment information and organizational information into separate books. The Boy

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

Scouts have one main publication per rank that includes all the same material (badge attainment information, rank rules, protocol, statements, etc.). The two girls' texts are comparable to the boys' single text; therefore, I refer to the "girls' handbook" and consider the two books a single resource.

3. Activities coded as self oriented are not necessarily required by the organization to be executed alone. Activities were coded as self oriented if the activity description specifically indicated that it should be accomplished individually or implied individual action (e.g., reading) or if the activity instructions did not specifically call for the presence of others. For instance, the activity, "Visit the newsroom of a newspaper," (Boy Scouts of America 2006, 166) was coded as a self-oriented activity because the instructions do not include others, whereas the activity, "In a troop, group, or with other girls, brainstorm a list of ways you can help the environment," (Girl Scouts of the USA 2001, 127) was coded as others oriented because the instructions expressly call for others to be present.

4. This reliability rate is based on the results of a second coder's coding of 15 badges in both organizations for the Wordplay code as well as the activities for two badges using the self-oriented and others-oriented activity codes.

5. I compare the Girl Scout law with the Boy Scout law rather than with the much shorter Cub Scout law ("Law of the Pack") because the Cub Scout and Girl Scout laws are not parallel in either construction or content, prohibiting valuable comparison. The Girl Scout and Boy Scout laws, on the other hand, are very similar.

6. Auster (1985) offers an alternative argument, suggesting that the effort-based language of "trying to be" rather than the identity-based language of "being" is instead an indicator of progressiveness within the Girl Scouts because this type of language promotes evaluative decision making rather than blind obedience.

REFERENCES

Acker, Joan. 1999. Gender and organizations. In *Handbook of the sociology of gender,* edited by Janet Saltzman Chafetz. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

Adler, Patricia, and Peter Adler. 1998. *Peer power: Preadolescent culture and identity.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Auster, Carol J. 1985. Manuals for socialization: Examples from Girl Scout handbooks: 1913-1984. *Qualitative Sociology* 8:359-67.

Bailey, Susan McGee. 1993. The current status of gender equity research in American schools. *Educational Psychologist* 28:321-39.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2004. Girls rule! Gender, feminism, and Nickelodeon. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21:119-39.

Beyer, Christine E., Roberta J. Ogletree, Dale O. Ritzel, Judy C. Drolet, Sharon L. Gilbert, and Dale Brown. 1996. Gender representation in illustrations, text, and topic areas in sexuality education curricula. *Journal of School Health* 66:361-64.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

Blair-Loy, Mary. 2003. *Competing devotions: Career and family among women executives.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Boy Scouts of America. n.d. *Boy Scouts of America National Council.* www.scouting.org (accessed June 1, 2009).

Boy Scouts of America. 2006. *Webelos handbook.* Irving, TX: Boy Scouts of America.

Chodorow, Nancy. 1974. Family structure and feminine personality. In *Women, culture, and society,* edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Clark, Roger, Jessica Guilmain, Paul Khalil Saucier, and Jocelyn Tavarez. 2003. Two steps forward, one step back: The presence of female characters and gender stereotyping in award-winning picture books between the 1930s and 1960s. *Sex Roles* 49:439-49.

Clark, Roger, Rachel Lennon, and Leanna Morris. 1993. Of Caldecotts and Kings: Gendered images in recent American children's books by Black and non-Black illustrators. *Gender & Society* 7:227-45.

Clark, Sheryl, and Carrie Paechter. 2007. "Why can't girls play football?": Gender dynamics and the playground. *Sport, Education and Society* 12:261-76.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* Cambridge, MA: Unwin Hyman.

Collins, W. Andrew. 1984. Conclusion: That status of basic research on middle childhood. In *Development during middle childhood: The years from six to twelve,* edited by W. Andrew Collins. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Connell, Raewyn. 2000. *The men and the boys.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Correll, Shelley J. 2001. Gender and the career choice process: The role of biased self-assessments. *American Journal of Sociology* 106:1691-730.

Corsaro, William A. 2005. *The sociology of childhood.* 2d ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Currie, Dawn. 1999. *Girl talk.* Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Doswell, Willa, Georgia Millor, Hayley Thompson, and Betty Braxter. 1998. Self-image and self-esteem in African-American preteen girls: Implications for mental health. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 19:71-94.

Dworkin, Shari L., and Faye Linda Wachs. 2004. "Getting your body back": Postindustrial fit motherhood in *Shape Fit Pregnancy* magazine. *Gender & Society* 18:610-24.

Evans, Lorraine, and Kimberly Davies. 2000. No sissy boys here: A content analysis of the representation of masculinity in elementary reading textbooks. *Sex Roles* 42:255-70.

Furnham, Adrian, Staci Abramsky, and Barrie Gunter. 1997. A cross-cultural content analysis of children's television advertisements. *Sex Roles* 37:91-99.

Garey, Anita. 1999. *Weaving work and motherhood.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

Girl Scouts of the USA. 2001. *Junior Girl Scout badge book.* New York: Girl Scouts of the United States of America.

Girl Scouts of the USA 2008 annual report. 2008. http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/facts/pdf/2008_annual_report.pdf (accessed July 15, 2009).

Gonick, Marnina. 2004. Old plots and new identities: Ambivalent femininities in late modernity. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 25:189-209.

Gooden, Angela M., and Mark A. Gooden. 2001. Gender representation in notable children's picture books: 1995-1999. *Sex Roles* 45:89-101.

Grauerholz, Elizabeth, and Bernice A. Pescosolido. 1989. Gender representation in children's literature: 1900-1984. *Gender & Society* 3:113-25.

Guimond, Serge, and Lydie Roussel. 2001. Bragging about one's school grades: Gender stereotyping and students' perception of their abilities in science, mathematics, and language. *Social Psychology of Education* 4:275-93.

Hamilton, Mykol C., David Anderson, Michelle Broaddus, and Kate Young. 2006. Gender stereotyping and under-representation of female characters in 200 popular children's picture books: A twenty-first century update. *Sex Roles* 55:757-65.

Hantover, Jeffrey P. 1982. The Boy Scouts and the validation of masculinity. In *The American man,* edited by Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Heyward, Candace. 1995. Catching up: Gender values at a Canadian independent school for girls, 1978-1993. *Gender and Education* 7:189-204.

Hochschild, Arlie. 1989. *The second shift: Working parents and the revolution at home.* New York: Viking.

Jackson, Sue, and Susan Gee. 2005. Look Janet, no you look John: Constructions of gender in early school reader illustrations across 50 years. *Gender and Education* 17:115-28.

Kohn, Melvin K. 1959. Social class and the exercise of parental authority. *American Sociological Review* 24:352-66.

Kohn, Melvin K. 1979. The effects of social class on parental values and practices. In *The American family: Dying or developing,* edited by David Reiss and Howard Hoffman. New York: Plenum.

Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Leaper, Campbell, Lisa Breed, Laurie Hoffman, and Carly Ann Perlman. 2002. Variations in the gender-stereotyped content of children's television cartoons across genres. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 32:1653-62.

Lee, James Daniel. 1998. Which kids can "become" scientists? Effects of gender, self-concepts, and perceptions of scientists. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 61:199-219.

Lesko, Nancy. 2001. *Act your age! A cultural construction of adolescence.* New York: Routledge Falmer.

Low, Juliette Gordon. 1917. *How girls can help their country: Handbook for Girl Scouts.* New York: The Girl Scout National Headquarters.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013

McIntyre, Lisa J. 2006. *The practical skeptic: Core concepts in sociology.* New York: McGraw-Hill.
Mechling, Jay. 2001. *On my honor.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Mensinger, Janell. 2001. Conflicting gender role prescriptions and disordered eating in single-sex and coeducational school environments. *Gender and Education* 13:417-29.
Messner, Michael. 2000. Barbie girls versus sea monsters: Children constructing gender. *Gender & Society* 14:765-84.
Messner, Michael. 2009. *It's all for the kids: Gender, families, and youth sports.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
Milkie, Melissa A. 1999. Social comparisons, reflected appraisals, and mass media: The impact of pervasive beauty images on Black and white girls' self-concepts. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62:190-210.
Revzin, Rebekah. 1998. American girlhood in the early twentieth century: The ideology of Girl Scout literature, 1913-1930. *Library Quarterly* 68:261-75.
Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Shelley J. Correll. 2000. Limiting inequality through interaction: The end(s) of gender. *Contemporary Sociology* 29:110-20.
Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Shelley J. Correll. 2004. Unpacking the gender system: A theoretical perspective on gender beliefs and social relations. *Gender & Society* 18:510-31.
Rosenthal, Michael. 1986. *The character factory: Baden-Powell and the origins of the Boy Scout movement.* New York: Pantheon.
Rothschild, Mary Aickin. 1981. To scout or to guide? The Girl Scout–Boy Scout controversy, 1912-1941. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 6:115-21.
Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *Texts, facts, and femininity.* London: Routledge.
Tietz, Wendy M. 2007. Women and men in accounting textbooks: Exploring the hidden curriculum. *Issues in Accounting Education* 22:459-80.
Weitzman, Lenore J., Deborah Eifler, Elizabeth Hokada, and Catherine Ross. 1972. Sex-role socialization in picture books for preschool children. *American Journal of Sociology* 77:1125-50.

Kathleen E. Denny is a doctoral student at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her current research focuses on gender, parenting, and mental health, cultural images of good parenting, and work-family conflict and inequalities.

Downloaded from gas.sagepub.com at Oxford Brookes University on January 4, 2013